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AUTHOR Milburn, Norweeta G.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

The reliability and validity of the Inventory of Socially Supportive Behaviors (ISSB), a measure designed to tap behaviors pertaining to the provision of social support, were studied. Data were analyzed on a pre-test sample of 100 adults from a community-based, epidemiologic study of 1,008 black adults in Virginia. Findings are presented on the internal consistency of the ISSB, including its dimensionality and the relation of the scale to the other aspects of social support such as structural social support network characteristics. Results show that the ISSB has reliability for use with community-based minority groups, is a reasonable measure of social support, and has very good internal consistency. However, its validity was not supported. Cognitive/informational support and appraisal/emotional support were the most robust dimensions of the ISSB. For black adults, support that results from the self-affirming and self-validating messages inherent in these types of supportive interaction seem to be important. The findings are compared to those of previous researchers such as M. Barrera et al (1983) and J. P. Stokes and D. G. Wilson (1984). Component One from the principle components analysis and components of the ISSB from the varimax rotation are listed. (TJH)

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Inventory of Socially Supportive Behaviors: Reliability and Validity Among Blacks

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Norweeta G. Milburn
Diane R. Brown
Lawrence E. Gary

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the reliability and validity of the Inventory of Socially Supportive Behaviors (ISSB), a measure designed to tap behaviors pertaining to the provision of social support, in a pretest sample of 100 adults from a community-based, epidemiologic study of 1008 Black adults. Findings are presented on the internal consistency of the scale including its dimensionality and the relation of the scale of the other aspects of social support such as structural social support network characteristics. The discussion compares these findings to those of previous researchers such as Barrera and his colleagues (1983) and Stokes and Wilson (1984).

INVENTORY OF SOCIALLY SUPPORTIVE BEHAVIORS: RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY AMONG BLACKS

INTRODUCTION

The Inventory of Socially Supportive Behaviors (ISSB), a 40 item scale based upon the work of several social supportive researchrs (e.g., Gottlieb, 1978; Hirsch, 1982), examines the assistance that people provide to one another (Barrera, Sandler & Ramsay, 1981). The items focus on forms of aid. The scale was developed using samples of college students; however, it is an instrument that is appropriate for use in community-based surveys, especially epidemiologic research on social support and psychological well-being. The items are behavior specific with minimal subjectivity. Universality was used to select the items; consequently, the wording of the items is not directed towards one specific population. Lastly, "explicit reference to states of psychological adjustment were omitted" in developing the items to avoid confounding the relationship between social support and psychological well-being (Barrera, et al., 1981). The reliability and validity of this scale has been tested in samples of college students and pregnant adolescents, some of whom were Black and Hispanic, and its internal consistancy (Cronbach's alpha) has ranged from .92 to .94 (Barrera, et al., 1981; Barrera & Ainley, 1983; Stokes & Wilson, 1984).

The purpose of this paper is to explore the reliability and validity of the ISSB in a community-based sample of Black adults from an epidemiologic study. Reliability will be explored by examining the internal consistency of the scale. Validity will

be tested by exploring its relationship to other measures pertaining to social support such as structural and qualitative social support network (SSN) characteristics. Previous researchers have used similar strategies in their psychometric assessments of the ISSB; specifically Barrera and his colleagues (1981, 1983), and Stokes and Wilson (1984).

METHOD

Sample

The sample consists of 100 Black adults, age 18 and older, from Alexandria, Virginia; 47 percent of whom were male. The median age was 34 years with a range of 18 to 83 years. The median education level was 12.0 years of schooling (S.D. = 3.2); 70 percent were high school graduates. Thirty-two percent were married. Thirty-four percent had total family incomes of $25,000 or more per annum. These respondents served as a pretest for a larger community-based survey of 1008 Black adults in Norfolk, Virginia. They were interviewed face-to-face in their homes.

Measures

The ISSB was part of the interview instrument. Additional items assessed structural SSN characteristics. These included:

1. the length of time respondents had known members of their social support network,
2. how often respondents talked to members of their social support network,
3. the proximity of members of their social support network,
4. how often family members provided assistance, and
5. how often friends provided assistance.

Other items measured the qualitative SSN characteristics. These included:

1. whether it was difficult to go to their social support network members for assistance,
2. how satisfied respondents were with the assistance provided by their social support network,
3. the closeness of family members, and
4. the closeness of friends.

FINDINGS

Reliability

The reliability of the ISSB was very good for this community-based Black sample. The Cronbach's alpha was .96 with a mean inter-item correlation of .37. Scores ranged from 40 to 200 with a mean score of 102.6 (SD=33.34). Principle components analysis of the ISSB items resulted in ten components with eigenvalues greater than one. Table I presents the findings for the ISSB items on component one. The largest difference in eigenvalues occurred between component one (16.01) and component two (3.08). These two components accounted for 48 percent of the variance. Component one alone accounted for 40 percent! This suggests the ISSB is unidimensional for this sample.

However, as was done in previous research on the psychometric properties of the ISSB, the dimensions of social support were explored. Specifically, a replication of the work of Stokes and Wilson (1984) and Barrera and Ainley (1983) was attempted. Their procedures were followed. Four of the ten components were kept and rotated orthogonally using a varimax rotation. Only four components were used because the eigenvalues

of eight components were less than 2.0 and previous research on social suppport has suggested at least four types of support: emotional, tangible, cognitive/informational and appraisal (see Leavy, 1983 for a review of the literature).

Table I shows the results of this analysis. A cutoff of .40 was used for the minimum loading on a component. The first component represented cognitive/informational support. Variables that had high loadings on this component included explaining mistakes, clarifying expectations and providing information. The second component was appraisal/emotional support which included variables such as expressing interest and concern, expressing closeness, and praising achievements. The third component represented tangible support such as watching possessions, giving and lending money, and providing a place to stay. The fourth component consisted of only two variables that were somewhat dissimilar--one was a form of tangible support and the other a form of informational support. Reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha) for these components as scales were .95, .91, .87, and .76, respectively.

Validity

Previous research on the ISSB has found that this scale is related to several structural SSN characteristics such as the size and density, and the number of close relationships. In addition, researchers have suggested tha the ISSB should be related to the perceived quality of network relationships and interactions (Barrera, et al. 1981; Stokes & Wilson, 1984).

The only structural and qualitative SSN characteristics that were found to be significantly related to the ISSB were how often family members provided support (r= .16, p< .05), and the perceived closeness of family members (r= .25, p< .05). Both of these were relatively small correlations.

DISCUSSION

These findings are similar to those of previous researchers. nonetheless, this paper contributes to literature on the development of the ISSB in several ways. One, it substantiates the usefulness and universality of the ISSB as a reasonable measure of social support by documenting its reliability for use with community-based minority samples. The ISSB is essentially a unidimensional scale that hangs together nicely from a conceptual and methodological standpoint. Even in this small sample, the scale had very good internal consistency. Cognitive/informational support and appraisal/emotional support were the more robust, meaningful of dimensions of the scale that emerged in the analyses. For Black adults, the support that results from the self-affirming and self-validating messages inherent in these types of supportive interactions seems to be important.

Second, it enhances our understanding of the multidimensionality of social support by exploring how the behavioral process or actual provision of social support is related to the structure of the social support network. As a test of validity, the structural and qualitative SSN characteristics were not strongly related to the ISSB. The

frequency of support and the perceived closeness of network members were, at best, weakly correlated with ISSB scores. These findings do support the validity of the ISSB. They suggest that the structural and qualitative SSN characteristics and the ISSB are tapping a similar construct, and, as previous research has found, that structural and qualitative SSN characteristics may not adequately tap all the components of social support (Leavy, 1983).

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TABLE I
COMPONENT ONE FROM THE PRINCIPLE COMPONENTS ANALYSIS

	ISSB ITEM	LOADING
34	Loaned you over $25	.78
40	Loaned you under $25	.78
23	Helped you understand why you did not do something well	.77
33	Told you what to expect in a situation that was about to happen	.76
12	Assisted you in setting a goal for yourself	.76
25	Gave you under $25	.75
25	Loaned/gave you something that you needed	.73
35	Taught you how to do something	.72
17	Gave you over $25	.72
28	Told you how he/she felt in a situation that was similar to yours	.70
13	Made it clear what was expected of you	.70
31	Told you that she/he felt very close to you	.69
19	Gave you some information to help you understand a situation that you were in	.69
21	Checked back with you to see if you followed the advice you were given	.69
27	Said things that made your situation clearer and easier to understand	.69
32	Told you who you should see for assistance	.68
16	Suggested some action that you should take	.64
10	Told you that you were ok just the way you are	.64
5	Told you what she/he did in a situation that was similar to yours	.63
29	Let you know that he/she would always be around if you needed assistance	.63
30	Expressed interest and concern in your well-being	.63
11	Told you that she/he would keep the things that you talked about private--just between the two of you	.62
15	Gave you some information on how to do something	.62
9	Went with you to someone who could take action	.61
38	Provided you with a place to stay	.61
20	Provided you with some transportation	.60
14	Expressed respect for something you did well	.60
36	Gave you feedback on how you were doing without saying it was good or bad	.59
4	Watched after your possessions when you were away	.56
26	Agreed that what you wanted to do was right	.55
18	Comforted you by showing you some physical affection	.54
24	Listened to you talk about your private feelings	.54
3	Provided you with a place where you could get away for a while	.54
37	Joked and kidded to try to cheer you up	.53
6	Did some activity with you to help you get your mind off things	.53
2	Stayed right there with you physically in a stressful situation	.50

TABLE I (CONT'D)

	ISSB ITEM	LOADING
39	Pitched in to help you do something that needed to get done	.47
8	Let you know that you did something well	.46
7	Talked with you about some interests of yours	.38
1	Looked after a family member when you were away	.35

TABLE II

COMPONENTS OF THE ISSB FROM THE VARIMAX ROTATION

COMPONENT 1		
23	Helped you understand why you did not do something well	.84
13	Made it clear what was expected of you	.73
34	Loaned you over $25	.72
19	Gave you some information to help you understand a situation that you were in	.70
35	Taught you how to do something	.65
27	Said things that made your situation clearer and easier to understand	.65
33	Told you what to expect in a situation that was about to happen	.65
17	Gave you over $25	.63
36	Gave you feedback on how you were doing without saying it was good or bad	.60
12	Assisted you in setting a goal for yourself	.58
15	Gave you some information on how to do something	.55
21	Checked back with you to see if you followed the advice that you were given	.54
9	Went with you to someone who could take action	.53
16	Suggested some action that you should take	.48
25	Loaned/gave you something that you needed	.48
26	Agreed that what you wanted to do was right	.46
11	Told you that she/he would keep the things that you talked about private--just between the two of you	.42
COMPONENT 2		
30	Expressed interest and concern in your well-being	.74
31	Told you that she/he felt very close to you	.73
8	Let you know that you did something well	.72
10	Told you that you were ok just the way you are	.62
7	Talked with you about some interests of yours	.62
6	Did some activity with you to help you get your mind off things	.61
24	Listened to you talk about your private feelings	.61
29	Let you know that he/she would always be around if you needed assistance	.60
37	Joked and kidded to try to cheer you up	.56
28	Told you how he/she felt in a situation that was similar to yours	.54
14	Expressed respect for something you did well	.53
COMPONENT 3		
2	Stayed right there with you physically in a stressful situation	.78
4	Watched after your possessions when you were away	.75
22	Gave you under $25	.54

TABLE II (CONT'D)

1	Looked after a family member when you were away	.53
40	Loaned you under $25	.53
38	Provided you with a place to stay	.51
5	Told you what he/she did in a situation that was similar to yours	.46
3	Provided you with a place where you could get away for awhile	.46
20	Provided you with some transportation	.44

COMPONENT 4

39	Pitched in to help you do something that needed to get done	.70
32	Told you who you should see for assistance	.53